Mosaic of Harmony: India's composite culture from medieval roots to modern reality

A Synopsis Report Submitted in for pursuing the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History,

Ranchi University, Ranchi

2024

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1.Introduction

Most of the classical civilizations have perished, but the Indian civilization has not only survived the vicissitudes of time but along with it, has also maintained, developed, and enriched through a continuous culture. To which Allama Iqbal has stated, *'yunan-o-misr-o-roma sab mit gaye jahan se, ab tak magar hai baqi nam-o-nishan hamara'* Further he states *'kuchh bat hai ke hasti, mitti nahin hamari'*, saying that there is something which is the secret of our continuous existence with wisdom. That's the culture that came up with the expression of the fusion of mighty rivers fed by many tributaries and streams, which has been popularly called *ganga-jamuni* culture, allowing Rabindranath Tagore to call India "as a confluence, a meeting place of many races and cultures"

A composite culture develops by the interaction, fusion, and occasionally absorption of many cultural practices, languages, religious beliefs, and social standards. Such cultural interaction frequently appears in the areas located on the routes of historical migrations, trade routes, or colonial influences, where several cultural groups have come into contact and affected one another throughout time.

Looking through the psychological dimensions of the history of medieval and modern India, one comes across the Hindu-Muslim religio-cultural tensions, along with the movements and individual efforts of understanding and establishing harmony between the communities. As India's first president Rajendra Prasad stated that none of the conquests was purely religious in nature, throughout these eight or nine hundred years as "they were actuated by temporal and material motives rather than by religious zeal". Even Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, otherwise known as an iconoclast, had "permitted image worship to his Hindu subjects in their separate quarters in his capital". As noted by Terry on Indian society that "every man has liberty to profess his own religion freely",

and were “getting equal opportunities in civil and military services” as mentioned by pietro de lla valle. As seen in the case of kayasthas as community that had begun to rise high in administrative position from eleven century onwards and by eighteen century they monopolized nearly all the clerical posts. And so moving through all of these on and off has led to the development of the syncretic cultural tradition in the Indian subcontinent. The tradition which is based “on mutual respect among Hindus and Muslims”. As both communities influence each other in manner, ceremonies, superstition, mysticism, and a common economic life. These tradition of “cultural intermingling and coexistence has created a composite culture, that is unique in its richness and vibrant mosaic of overlapping identities”.

The relationship between the communities was harmonized by the mughal period, and in the process, the most important agency of cross-fertilization are *sufi* and *bhakti* doctrine, which somehow tries to find equivalent ground between Vedanta and Sufism’s philosophy. As seen in the case of the effort made by prince Dara Shikoh through his work *majmaul-bahrain* (confluence of two oceans). There were some features even borrowed from Mahayana Buddhism like the concept of *sulh-i-kul* or *sufi* exercises like *habs-i-dam*(holding back of breath) came through Buddhist channel, all such interaction had “strengthened the composite culture in India”. To which Sir John Marshall has observed “seldom in the history of mankind has the spectacle been witnessed of two civilizations, so vast and so strongly developed, yet so radically dissimilar as the Muhammadan and Hindu, meeting and mingling together”.

By the promotion of intellectual and cultural contacts between east and west, the British colonial presence in India had even played an important role in the development of composite culture in the subcontinent. Western legal and educational institutions were merged with Indian customs, resulting in a hybrid cultural environment. Though during the same period, British officials tries to generate hostility between Hindu and Muslim through their policies of accentuating differences, paving the way for the growth of religious nationalism with time.

With the independence of the country, and the philosophy of secularism which guided the freedom movement and constitution makers, composite culture became the state policy, as reflected in the speech of Pt Nehru in parliament on the death of Maulana Azad calling him as a "very special representative in a high degree of the great composite culture which has gradually grown in India". The composite culture survives and remains widespread even today, which is corroborated by various studies, one such by Anthropological Survey of India under the 'people of India project'. According to the findings, Indian Muslim shares a very high percentage (96.77) of material and cultural traits relating to ecology, economy and occupation with Hindus, the ratio of shared traits between Muslim and Sikhs is 89.95 percent and that between Muslim and Buddhists is 91.95 percent".

1.2 Literature review

With the focus on composite cultural development, working and current applicability, this review will analyzes the principal academic work and research topics in the field. This survey of the literature highlight how centuries of cultural synthesis and integration have formed India's composite culture, which is rich and dynamic. Beginning with the writings of Tara Chand who had investigated the significant influence of Islam on India's cultural fabric. Chand draws attention to how Islamic and Indian aspects are harmoniously combined in a variety of fields, including music, literature, and architecture. Chand contends that India's civilization has been enhanced by this synthesis of cultures, which is characterized by mutual interchange rather than imposition and highlights India's dynamic and developing nature. As seen in the case of the impact of Persian culture on India which had been examined by Richard M. Eaton, who emphasizes how Persian language, literature, and administrative customs influenced Indian society. Eaton explains the political and cultural contacts that made this impact possible, highlighting the Persianate elites' contribution to the development of a cosmopolitan

society. He contends that by combining many customs, Persianate culture created a distinct Indian identity

Showcasing the fusion of Persian, Indian, and Central Asian styles, Catherine B. Asher investigates the architectural breakthroughs of the Mughal era. In her analysis, Asher shows how Mughal architecture symbolized both artistic elegance and imperial authority, symbolic and utilitarian qualities, contending that they tell a more comprehensive story about India's architectural legacy by demonstrating a nuanced interaction between royal ideas and cultural influences. Looking at the spiritual aspect of composite culture, the *bhakti* and *sufi* traditions are examined by Annemarie Schimmel and John Stratton Hawley, they made contribution to religious syncretism and common spiritual practices. Schimmel looks at how Sufi mysticism, through saints like Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, promoted community harmony by bridging sectarian boundaries. Poets like Kabir and Mirabai, who has promoted harmony and equality, they are examples of the inclusive spirituality of the *bhakti* movement, which Hawley emphasizes. Both writers stress the significance of these spiritual movements in India's composite culture and how they established a common religious and cultural space.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Rila Mukherjee investigate how migration and commerce routes promoted cross-cultural interactions and the blending of customs. Mukherjee emphasizes the Indian Ocean's function in uniting disparate areas and permitting the movement of products, people, and ideas, which promoted the development of a composite culture in early modern India. With a focus on the Portuguese Empire, Subrahmanyam demonstrates how their commercial exchanges resulted in a notable mingling of European, African, and Asian aspects in culture. Both authors highlight the significant influence that economic exchanges have on the evolution of culture, highlighting the critical roles that migration and trade played in fostering a shared and dynamic cultural environment.

The authors' like Arjun Appadurai and Dipesh Chakrabarty offer perceptive viewpoints on how globalization affects composite culture and how modern identity politics interact

with historical cultural integration. Appadurai studies how migration, media, and cultural exchange processes of globalization redefine boundaries and impact local understandings of composite cultural values. In the framework of the global community, he highlights the flexibility and hybridity of cultural identities. Chakrabarty argues for diverse interpretations of history that take into account indigenous viewpoints and criticizes Eurocentric historical narratives. He talks on how suppressed cultural histories are reclaimed and how postcolonial theory subverts Western hegemony to influence contemporary identity politics. These writers show the intricate relationship between globalization, historical narratives, and modern cultural identity by highlighting the continuous reinterpretation and persistence of composite cultural values in the face of local conflicts and global influences.

When we look for how regular encounters between populations promote cultural integration we need to go through the writings of Veena Das and Gyanendra Pandey who had examined this aspect in their works. They had examined common celebrations and social customs that support a blended cultural identity in the face of societal obstacles, Das looks at modern-day India. She stresses how everyday occurrences mold communal identities from an anthropological point of view. In her research, Pandey explores colonial North India and shows how social interactions at the local level resisted the divides between communities that colonialism fostered. In order to create a cohesive cultural fabric, he demonstrates how common cultural practices and community solidarity overcame narratives that divided people. Both pieces highlight how important it is for local interactions to foster a sense of shared cultural identity and ease communal tensions, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms of resilience and cultural integration in heterogeneous cultures.

Looking over the recent trend and the growth of communalism and its effects on India's diverse cultural legacy, which are critically examined by Christophe Jaffrelot and Harsh Mander. The political supremacy of the Hindu nationalist movement is examined in depth in Jaffrelot's thesis, which also emphasizes how it has exacerbated intercommunal

tensions and undermined secular principles in India. He talks about how communalism undermines India's pluralistic society and imperils the survival of blended cultural values. With an emphasis on how communalism and majoritarianism threaten India's diversity and communal unity, Mander's work offers a modern viewpoint on sociopolitical issues. He promotes pluralistic and inclusive strategies to preserve India's cultural legacy in the face of conflicting narratives. Collectively, these research projects provide valuable perspectives on the intricate workings of community politics and how they affect the maintenance of India's multifaceted cultural identity.

So, the proposal aims to study different aspects of composite culture in India and its relevance in the modern age to safeguard national integrity. Several authors worked on this topic but still there is a gap in literature. Thus, the present study will attempt to fill the gap and hence it will be an addition to the present literature.

1.3 The Literature gap

The exploration of composite culture in India reveals its multifaceted nature, yet several critical research gaps persist. Prioritizing underappreciated areas and their distinct contributions to composite culture is first and foremost necessary. A more sophisticated knowledge of how composite culture appears throughout India can be obtained by comprehending these regional differences. Furthermore, there is still a lack of research on how globalization affects composite culture. The way that customs are upheld, altered, or challenged in modern settings has been impacted by the way that globalization has changed cross-cultural relationships. Studying composite culture's function in navigating contemporary identity politics—like nationalism and communalism—is equally important. Culture and national identity are impacted when these beliefs collide with cultural narratives. It is essential to investigate the ways in which state policies, legal structures, and political movements either reinforce or weaken composite cultural ideals and practices. This entails analyzing the ways in which political ideology, state creation,

and historical occurrences like division have shaped cultural identities and manifestations.

2. Statement of problem

India's composite culture, which is a merging of various religious, social, and cultural customs, is in danger of disintegrating. Community differences have been made worse by rising inter-communal tensions and the politicization of religious identities. By encouraging distrust and conflict and upsetting enduring customs of cohabitation and respect for one another, this threatens the fundamentals of composite culture. The perception of India's mixed past can be distorted by historical revisionism and the promotion of exclusive cultural narratives. Media and technology have a prevalent influence that might adversely affect traditional traditions by influencing cultural views and values. Stereotypes can be strengthened or the richness of composite culture ignored by media portrayals, which can affect public opinion and cultural policy. This can sow discord and animosity by marginalizing some communities and their contributions to India's cultural mosaic.

3. Objective of research

- Explore the historical roots and factors responsible for the growth and evolution of composite culture in the medieval period.
- Study the impact of British rule on the evolution of composite culture.
- To investigate the regional variations shaping particular cultural dynamics.
- Examine how globalization has affected modern identity politics and traditional composite cultural practices, especially in light of the rise in nationalism and increasing tensions within communities.
- To investigate the key challenges faced by the composite culture in India.

4. Research Hypothesis

- The policies and actions of medieval rulers significantly influenced the development and evolution of composite culture in the Indian subcontinent.
- The actions and policies of British and Indian political leaders in preserving or disrupting the composite culture.
- There are certain regional differences in terms of the development of composite culture with their unique regional elements on it.
- The traditional composite cultural practices were reshaped by globalization and contemporary identity politics.
- The Socio-political challenges have significantly undermined the preservation and continuity of composite culture.

5. Research design

5.1 Research methodology

Methodology represents an essential intermediate process between 'theory' on one hand and the sources or raw data on other. They are what tie the various parts of research together and make it justifiable to others. This research on composite culture will employ both qualitative and quantative approach to offer a thorough examination of the difficulties and tactics involved in maintaining this cultural phenomenon. This research will employ interdisciplinary approach, where perspective from history, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies will be taken into consideration. Comparative approach will help in understanding the nuances of composite culture in different regions, and the thematic analysis of these regions, the development of religion, art, cuisine, festivals and everyday practices of the communities. So in order to achieve this, a detail case study will be done on certain regions. This strategy guarantees a comprehensive examination of the subject matter's breadth and depth, enabling a nuanced comprehension of the complex processes at work.

5.2 Tools and techniques for data collection

Collection of primary data through in-depth interviews of respondents during different religious festivals and customs different communities as these discussions with the community will provide diverse perspective and in-depth qualitative data . Primary data will also be collected through questionnaires as well as going through the manuscript of the period. Secondary data and facts will be collected from consultations of concerned books, journals and previous researches to provide the contextual background and use of digital database to maintain the continuity of ideas in the field of study providing wide range of cultural material and narratives.

5.3 Analysis of data

In order to convert raw data into insightful understandings and support findings based on solid evidence, data analysis is essential in research on composite cultures. The examination of past data facilitates the discovery of enduring trends and patterns in cross-cultural communication and exchange. This offers a thorough comprehension of the evolution of composite culture over time. Deeper understanding of cultural dynamics is gained by thematic and content analysis of qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, and archival research. It also validates theories on cultural syncretism and integration. Analysis enables the identification of particular issues that composite cultures face, such as the rise of nationalism, and socioeconomic inequality. Researchers can make discoveries, connections, and understandings through data analysis that advance the fields of historical and cultural studies.

6. Relevance of study

Academic research and modern society can both benefit greatly from an understanding of composite culture in India. Understanding the past and present processes of cultural syncretism and integration gives important insights into the intricacies of India's social structure and lessons that may be applied to other multicultural and multiethnic countries across the globe. Understanding the dynamics of composite culture can provide insightful insights into building inclusive and peaceful communities in an era of increased globalization and cross-cultural exchange. In addition to being intellectually stimulating, studying composite culture in India is also relevant from a social and political standpoint. Thus the conclusion obtained during present research study and suggestions will remain useful for maintenance of harmony of composite culture in India. So, this research shows its significance in solving problems related to composite culture.

7. Need and utility of topic in current scenario

In the globalized world of today, composite culture views diversity as an asset rather than a source of conflict. It offers a framework for honoring and valuing various cultural identities, encouraging tolerance and mutual understanding amongst groups. An vital part of a community's identity, composite culture upholds and encourages past customs and practices. It makes sure that cultural heritage is preserved for future generations, encouraging pride and a sense of community among various communities. Promoting composite culture can act as a conflict resolution strategy in areas where ethnic or community tensions are common. It closes gaps and encourages communication between disparate groups by highlighting similar cultural values and customs. Governments can create laws that uphold and defend composite culture, guaranteeing each cultural group equal rights and opportunities. This covers programs for cultural exchange, cultural preservation, and institution support. By giving the impression of cultural diversity and openness, composite culture strengthens a country's soft power on a global scale. In the

contemporary context, fostering and accepting composite culture is essential to creating inclusive communities and advancing global sustainable development.

8. Contribution to the current knowledge

The proposed study aims to analyze the past processes of cultural fusion, adaptation, and interaction. The study clarifies the complexity of cultural evolution and continuity by looking at how many societies coexisted and traded cultural practices over time. This study will also look after the regional variations and how regions develop their culture through assimilation with different communities. Studying composite cultures offers frameworks for tackling modern problems in a globalized world where identity politics, migration, and globalization coexist. And providing insights into how different cultures might effectively handle, through cultural shifts, celebrate variety, and creating thriving communities. Understanding this process is crucial for appreciating the depth and complexity of culture and addressing contemporary challenges to its inclusive legacy.

9. Future work

The study of composite culture in India contains numerous prospective research areas that can offer greatly to both academic knowledge and practical applications.

Proposed Chapters

Introduction

1. Traces of the composite culture during the medieval period
2. Composite culture during colonial era
3. Regional cultural variations in subcontinent
4. Globalization and emerging identities
5. Socio-political challenges to composite culture

Conclusion

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